



City of Bel Aire Senior Services Engagement Report

**Prepared by
Wichita State University**

*Public Policy and
Management Center*

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**Paula Downs, Talent and
Professional Services
Manager**

www.wichita.edu/ppmc



**WICHITA STATE
UNIVERSITY**

*DIVISION OF DIVERSITY AND
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT*

*Public Policy and
Management Center*

Background

The Public Policy and Management Center (PPMC) at Wichita State University assisted the City of Bel Aire with an engagement process to capture input around the future of senior services in the community. The PPMC engaged seniors to gather feedback that would be used to assist the City in making decisions around senior services staffing needs, program and activities, and funding levels. Senior community members were able to provide input by attending one of two focus group meetings or by responding to an online or printed survey. Engagement opportunities were made available to 200 Bel Aire seniors.

Feedback

Input was provided by approximately 40 seniors who responded to the following questions:

1. What is your favorite thing about Bel Aire Senior Services as they are today?
2. What does Bel Aire Senior Services do well?
3. What things about Bel Aire Senior Services could be improved?
4. What activities or educational sessions that you've attended have been helpful or impactful for you?
5. What types of events, activities or education sessions would you like to see in the future?
6. What other thoughts would you like for us to take back to the City regarding Senior Services?

Feedback has been summarized into the following categories:

Communication

Seniors overall appreciate the opportunity to receive email notifications and the monthly calendar. There are concerns about the accuracy and timeliness of the information. The following input was received:

- There are issues with the email lists and who receives them - they need to be updated
- Emails need to be sent out in a timely manner - early in the day, since most seniors check emails only once a day
- Cancellation of events or changes in locations or times need to be announced in a timely manner through multiple channels
- Email and calendar information often do not match up or are not consistently received

- It would be helpful to have all senior activities listed in one place, so everyone is clear about events and activities

Events

The senior community is relatively happy with the variety of events offered to them. They enjoy the ability to network and socialize with other seniors in the community. They appreciate the accessibility and availability of space at the Recreation and Senior Centers. They do enjoy education events, however, some of the subjects are not appealing and they don't like presentations that become focused on selling something. They would like to see new educational presentations instead of the same ones every year.

Favorite events and activities:

- Potlucks (would like to have the main dish provided since seniors are on limited budgets)
- Antiques Roadshow
- Book club
- Card clubs- bridge, pitch, etc.
- Line dancing
- Exercise classes
- Health events- flu shots, etc.
- Medicare/Medicaid enrollment assistance
- Dynamic aging classes
- Sewing club
- Walking club

Events/Activities they want to return or be initiated:

- Bingo
- Arts/Crafts
- Music events
- Presentations on community issues, opportunities
- Genealogy classes
- "How to" classes: sewing, cooking, sign language, gardening/composting
- Technology classes: computer, social media, cellphones
- Scam awareness
- Health classes (mental, nutrition)
- Legal: wills, trusts, etc.
- Presentations: Chief of Police; EMS, Health Department, Aging
- Day trips- restaurants for dinner; seasonal events/activities; cultural events- local, across the state, or nearby state

- Volunteer opportunities in Bel Aire and/or area
- Organization/downsizing

Participation

There is an awareness that participation has declined in the events and activities. It is recognized that in order to continue senior opportunities there needs to be increased involvement. Seniors advocated for growing involvement by outreach and some marketing efforts. Multiple individuals suggested that participation could be increased with the assistance of a consistent coordinator position. It was suggested that the coordinator position could assist in updating and developing email lists, developing and distributing improved communication information, develop and distribute welcome packets and information on senior events/activities and gathering information on senior events/activities in the area.

Accountability and Transparency

Feedback consistently stated that there should be a single senior group for the community. There is confusion related to having two separate groups who are funded by the City. Due to low membership/participation, there was a lot of discussion about consolidating efforts to create a more robust senior program. Seniors want to be involved in an advisory/planning board capacity to assist in developing events/activities and information for seniors in the community. It was discussed that funding should be provided to a single group and that budgets and reports be developed in conjunction with a senior representative from the advisory board. Advisory Board responsibilities should also include reviewing mandatory activities prescribed by Sedgwick County funding to provide suggestions on how to comply with requirements and meet the needs of seniors. Seniors also wanted the opportunity to participate in the process of hiring a coordinator position.

Recommendations

Seniors who participated in this engagement process provided valuable feedback on the current state of services and ideas on how to enhance senior services in the city. They appreciate the city staff support and the accessibility and availability of space at the Recreation and Senior Centers. They see opportunities to improve and expand services to seniors and they want to be part of identifying and developing events, activities and outreach.

The PPMC offers the following recommendations for consideration to improve, better coordinate and enhance senior services in the City of Bel Aire:

1. Provide a single senior services program via staff and funding support. A single senior services program will reduce duplication of events/activities, program confusion, and ensure consistent opportunities to all seniors in the community.
2. Evaluate Sedgwick County funding; to determine if the funding requirements are meeting the needs of Bel Aire seniors, and to identify if there are alternative ways to increase participation in the funding required activities.
3. Senior services should be supported by a designated city staff member, either existing or hired, at least part time. Responsibilities could include, but are not limited to, the following activities:
 - a. Development of a communication plan to ensure event and activity information is accurate and timely. Specific tools could include emails, calendars, newsletter, etc.;
 - b. Development and updating of email, phone and address information for the purposes of communicating information to seniors in the city;
 - c. Identify, develop and deliver events, activities, presentations, etc. with the assistance and input of an advisory board;
 - d. Identify and utilize volunteers to enhance services. Volunteers can provide presentations, lead activities or events, be sponsors, etc.;
 - e. Research, gather and distribute information on senior activities/events provided by other organizations and cities in the area;
 - f. Provide educational information on senior topics and activities via a newsletter. This effort could include information from contributing authors and could be enhanced with advertisements and/or sponsors;
 - g. Identify opportunities to partner with other organizations, cities, etc. to expand event/activity opportunities;
 - h. Research and apply for additional funding opportunities, including grants, sponsorships, etc.
4. Develop a planning committee of 4 – 6 members with a designated chair to identify and plan events and activities aligned with funding. This committee would meet regularly and be engaged in all planning, development and delivery activities.
5. With staff and planning committee support, develop an outreach plan to increase participation in events and activities. The plan should identify outreach opportunities at assisted living facilities, churches and other organizations, and host a table at local events. Outreach materials should be considered and could include information packets, newsletters and advertisement in local media outlets.